

April Rule of the Month

The PWGA tournament season is just beginning. To start you off right, I've included as our ROM for April a very important term--"Known or Virtually Certain". Its meaning is explained in Decision 26-1/1 from the Decisions on the Rules of Golf, 2008-2009. Having a good understanding of this term will help you determine whether you can obtain relief under the rules for a ball not found, or must consider a ball lost under penalty of stroke and distance.

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Rules Director

26-1/1 Meaning of "Known or Virtually Certain"

If a ball has been struck towards a water hazard and has not been found, the term "known or virtually certain" indicates the level of confidence that the ball is in the water hazard that is required for the player to proceed under Rule 26-1. A player may not assume that his ball is in a water hazard simply because there is a possibility that the ball may be in the hazard. If it is not known that the ball is in the water hazard, in order for the player to proceed under Rule 26-1 there must be almost no doubt that the ball is in the hazard. Otherwise, a ball that cannot be found must be considered lost outside the hazard and the player must proceed under Rule 27-1.

All available evidence must be taken into account in determining whether knowledge or virtual certainty exists, including any testimony and the physical conditions in the area around the water hazard. For example, if a water hazard is surrounded by a fairway on which a ball could hardly be lost, there exists a greater certainty that the ball is in the hazard than there would be if there were deep rough in the area. Observing a ball splash in a water hazard would not necessarily provide knowledge or virtual certainty as to the location of the ball as sometimes such a ball may skip out of a hazard.

The same principle would apply for a ball that may have been moved by an outside agency (Rule 18-1) or a ball that has not been found and may be in an obstruction (Rule 24-3) or an abnormal ground condition (Rule 25-1c). (Revised 2008)